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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project name:

North Delta National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition and Liberty Island Restoration Program

Project description: This proposal requests funding for the following tasks: 1) acquire fee title interest in the remaining two privately-owned properties on Liberty Island; 2) conduct restoration planning for Liberty Island; 3) implement the restoration plan for Liberty Island; 4) implement a monitoring program for the restoration; 5) operate and manage the restored island for three years; and 6) acquire fee title interest in two additional properties within the proposed North Delta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

In 1997, CALFED provided funding to acquire the majority of Liberty Island from Naumachia, Inc. That acquisition process is underway. If funded, this proposal will facilitate acquisition of the remainder of the island and the development and initiation of a program to restore tidal influence to this vital area in CALFED'S North Delta Corridor. Liberty Island supports significant existing wildlife values and has outstanding potential for restoration, floodplain management, and endangered species recovery. The restoration of Liberty Island is identified by CALFED's Volume II as Stage 1 Targeted Research. The property owners are willing sellers who requested that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) appraise their property. Properties identified in Phase II provide additional opportunities for restoration of tidally influenced and seasonal wetland habitats. CALFED is being asked to provide \$2,623,043 in Phase I and \$10,872,562 in Phase II to complete the funding process.

Project Size/Location: Liberty Island is located in Yolo and Solano counties, adjacent to Prospect Island and Little Holland Tract. The entire island encompasses 5,209 acres in the northern Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (CALFED's North Delta Corridor). The two Liberty Island properties (tract 65 and 66) described in this funding proposal encompass 181 and 268 acres respectively. (See map, Appendix A.) The two additional nearby properties (tract 68 and 64) encompass 1,808 and 3,426 acres respectively and are also located in Solano and Yolo counties. Tract 64 is immediately to the north of Liberty Island. Tract 68 is located within the Egbert Tract, to the south of Liberty Island and north of the City of Rio Vista.

Primary Biological/Ecological Objectives: The primary objective of this proposal is to complete acquisition of Liberty Island and to restore the island to tidal shallow-water, tidal emergent wetlands, seasonal wetlands, delta sloughs, and riparian habitats to benefit Delta smelt, winter-run Chinook salmon, Sacramento splittail, and many other Priority I-IV species. A related task is to develop and implement a monitoring program to assess and quantify these restoration efforts. Restoration of Liberty Island will contribute towards the purpose and goals of the proposed North Delta NWR. The purpose of the North Delta NWR is to restore and protect a native diversity of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. The refuge goals are to: 1) restore and protect habitats to promote the recovery of endangered, threatened and special concern species; and 2) restore and protect a native diversity of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats representative of the

Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta ecosystem, with an emphasis on native fish and migratory birds. The secondary objective of this proposal is to acquire additional lands within the proposed North Delta NWR with the intent to restore these properties to tidal shallow-water, tidal emergent wetlands, seasonal wetlands, delta sloughs, and riparian habitats.

This proposal will help meet CALFED's mission of restoring ecological health and improving water management for beneficial uses in the Bay-Delta system by addressing CALFED's Fresh Emergent Wetland Stage 1 Targeted Research/Stage 1 Action (ERP Vol 2, p. 99).

Costs, Adverse, and Third Party Impacts: The Service is requesting \$13,495,605 from CALFED to acquire two properties on Liberty Island, fund development of a restoration plan, restore the island, monitor the restoration effects, gain operation and management funds for 3 years, and acquire two additional properties within the proposed North Delta NWR. Anticipated third party impacts to the local tax base by withdrawal of these lands will be off-set by the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act; payments in lieu of taxes will be reimbursed to the communities annually.

Applicant Qualifications: *Sacramento Realty Office:* The Service's staff of eight has over 150 years of combined experience and currently manages over 670 square miles of habitat in California. The office is in the process of completing other CALFED-funded transactions.

Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR): The Stone Lakes NWR staff of seven currently manages about 1,000 acres of Service-owned land within the refuge project area and co-manages thousands of additional acres with agencies within the project area. The Service has obtained \$2.64 million for the restoration, enhancement, and management of refuge lands.

Jones and Stokes Associates: Jones and Stokes Associates has a long, proven track record of habitat restoration projects. They are working on portions of the environmental assessment establishing the North Delta NWR and will develop a restoration plan for Liberty Island.

Department of Water Resources (DWR) and Department of Fish and Game (DFG): Both agencies will assist with monitoring on Liberty Island. Experts from these agencies will provide over 150 years of combined experience with monitoring programs to this project.

Monitoring and Data Evaluation: The acquisitions will be tracked through the Service's Sacramento Realty Office from initiation through purchase. The Stone Lakes NWR staff will work with DWR and DFG to develop and implement a monitoring program for Liberty Island that is compatible with the Prospect Island monitoring program, a project already funded by CALFED. The monitoring will assess research questions involving fish and wildlife use of habitat, plant community development, affects of siltation and erosion on habitat, water quality conditions, phytoplankton species, benthic conditions, organic carbon, and more.

Local Support/Coordination with Other Programs: The following agencies and organizations support the Service's purchase (and restoration of) Liberty Island: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation,

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, California Department of Water Resources, California Department of Fish and Game, Wildlife Conservation Board, the Sacramento-Yolo Port Authority, Solano Irrigation District, Metropolitan Water District, and The Trust for Public Lands. The landowners also fully support this project (see letters of support Appendix E).

Acquisition and restoration of Liberty Island supports the goals and objectives of the Recovery Plan for Sacramento/San Joaquin Native Fishes; the Service's Central Valley San Francisco Bay Ecoregion Plan; Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture; USFWS Concept Plan for Waterfowl Wintering Habitat Preservation; Aleutian Canada Goose Recovery Plan; North American Waterfowl Management Plan; Salmon, Steelhead, and Trout Anadromous Fisheries Program Act of 1988; and the goals of the proposed North Delta NWR.

Compatibility with CALFED objectives: Acquisition of these properties can help improve the health of the Bay-Delta ecosystem, benefit several Priority I-IV species and Delta habitats, and yield broad ecosystem benefits. The proposal addresses four of the six CALFED goals and 10 of the objectives related to these goals including: priority I-IV species, natural floodplain/processes, Bay-Delta hydraulics, aquatic food web, levees, tidal perennial wetlands, freshwater emergent wetlands, seasonal wetlands, delta sloughs, and riparian corridors. Specifically, the proposal addresses CALFED's Fresh Emergent Wetland Stage 1 Targeted Research/Stage 1 Action (ERP, Vol 2., p. 99). Additionally, CALFED has recognized the importance of this area by providing funds to the Service to purchase the bulk of Liberty Island and to the DWR, to include some Liberty Island assessments as part of the Prospect Island monitoring program. This project complies with relevant laws and regulations, including NEPA/CEQA, will not prejudice CALFED's long term program, and involves only willing sellers.